

We claim:

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1. A mini-pallet comprising:
a substantially rectangular deck having an upper surface and having a perimeter comprising at least one double wall edge;
two downwardly projecting rails connected to said deck,
a downwardly projecting central support connected to said deck, and located intermediate of said two downwardly projecting rails.

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2. The mini-pallet of claim 1 wherein said deck, said downwardly projecting rails and said central support are integrally connected.

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3. The mini-pallet of claim 1 wherein said deck has two lateral sides which are approximately parallel and said downwardly projecting rails extend substantially a width of the deck in a direction parallel with said two lateral sides.

4. The mini-pallet of claim 3 wherein said vertical support is less than half the width of the deck in a direction parallel with said two lateral sides.

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5. The mini-pallet of claim 1 wherein said at least one double-wall edge further comprises at least two stiffening ridges longitudinally spaced along and connected to said at least one double-wall edge.

6. The mini-pallet of claim 5 wherein said double-wall edge has a U-shaped transverse cross-section, and further comprises at least two drain holes located on said at least one double-wall edge.

7. The mini-pallet of claim 1 wherein said deck further comprises a plurality of spaced-apart linear support members and at least two openings providing communication from the upper surface through the deck.

8. The mini-pallet of claim 7 wherein said linear support surfaces have a horizontal deck forming portion and a vertical reinforcing portion.

9. The mini-pallet of claim 7 wherein said linear support members have a T-shaped cross-sectional shape.

5 10. The mini-pallet of claim 7 wherein said deck further comprises a plurality of radially extending reinforcing ribs.

11. The mini-pallet of claim 7 wherein said spaced-apart linear support members form a grid-like pattern among said openings connecting said central support, said downwardly projecting rails, and said double-wall edge.

10 12. The mini-pallet of claim 1 further comprising a rail pocket opening upwardly through the upper surface of said deck, compatible with a downwardly projecting rail of a similarly shaped mini-pallet, and adapted to receive at least a portion of said similarly shaped mini-pallet rail when multiple mini-pallets are nested.

13. The mini-pallet of claim 12 further comprising a fitting bead within the rail pocket configured to contact a similarly configured mini-pallet's downwardly projecting rail when the similarly configured mini-pallet is nested atop the mini-pallet.

14. The mini-pallet of claim 12 further comprising a fitting tooth within the rail pocket configured to contact a similarly configured mini-pallet's downwardly projecting rail when the similarly configured mini-pallet is nested atop the mini-pallet

20 15. The mini-pallet of claim 1 wherein said downwardly projecting rails further comprise at least two lateral walls with bridging ribs, a horizontal base to form a lower surface of said projecting rails, and a vertical support member.

16. The mini-pallet of claim 15 wherein said bridging ribs have an inverted T-shaped cross-

section.

17. The mini-pallet of claim 1 wherein said central support has a substantially continuous circular outer perimeter.

18. The mini-pallet of claim 1 wherein said central support has a substantially continuous arcuate outer perimeter.

19. The mini-pallet of claim 1 wherein said central support has an outer edge defining an even-sided polygon.

20. The mini-pallet of claim 1 wherein said central support is compatible with a recessed portion in a tongue of a carrier.

21. The mini-pallet of claim 1 further comprising a pocket on the upper surface of the deck coaxial with said central support and adapted to receive at least a portion of a similarly shaped mini-pallet's central support when multiple mini-pallets are nested.

22. The mini-pallet of claim 2 wherein said pocket further comprises reinforcing ribs connected to an interior surface of said pocket.

23. A shipping tray comprising:

a deck having a pair of opposing lateral sides, said opposing lateral sides being substantially parallel;

a plurality of downwardly extending legs proximate with said opposing lateral sides;

a central support extending downwardly from about the center of said deck;

said deck ^{with} above at least a portion of said plurality of legs and said central support;

said central support having an exterior surface, and a pocket capable of receiving at least a portion of a similarly configured second shipping tray's central support when said second shipping tray is nested atop the shipping tray.

24. A tray comprising:

a deck;

two legs extending from a bottom surface of said deck;

two rail pockets located on a top surface of said deck and compatible to receive at least a portion of a similarly shaped tray's legs when said trays are stored in a nested position;

a central support located near the center of said deck, extending from a bottom surface of said deck, and having an outer perimeter portion compatible with a portion of a tongue of a carrier; and

a cylindrical pocket located on a top surface of said deck compatible to receive at least a portion of a similarly shaped tray's central support when said trays are in a nested position.

25. A method for distributing beverages from a truck utilizing at least one mini-pallet of the type having a deck having two downwardly projecting rails, a downwardly projecting central support intermediate the two downwardly projecting rails, and a pocket coaxial with said central support adapted to receive at least a portion of a similarly shaped mini-pallet's central support when multiple mini-pallets are nested, said method consisting of the following steps:

- a. loading the mini-pallet with at least a part of a customer order to form a beverage stack;
- b. placing the pallet on a truck
- c. driving the truck having at least one beverage stack to a desired location;
- d. placing a tongue of a hand-truck under the mini-pallet, said tongue having a compatible recess adapted to coordinate with the central support of said mini-pallet;

- e. lifting said mini-pallet with the hand-truck into a loaded position;
 - f. maneuvering said loaded hand-truck towards an open door of said truck;
 - g. off-loading said loaded hand-truck from said truck; and
 - h. maneuvering said hand-truck to an intended location.
- 5 i. unloading said beverage stack from said hand truck.

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